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ABSTRACT

A report examines the situation of adult education for immigrants and refugees in Australia. The first section situates the nation's immigration program within national economic development. The second section outlines the development of policy and programs relating to language and literacy education for migrants and refugees, and describes how policy and institutional approaches recognize diversity in the design and delivery of services. The third section summarizes research undertaken within the Adult Migrant English Program to identify groups of adult learners with special needs and the learning barriers that face them. These studies focus on how characteristics, expectations, and previous experiences of learning influence migrant learners' attempts to interpret and cope with the curriculum, teaching methods, resources, and tasks of the Australian language classroom. This section also details policies and practices developed to overcome these barriers and improve the effectiveness of learning. (Contains 56 references.) (MSE)

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HOW ADULTS LEARN

An International Conference
Sponsored jointly by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United States Department of Education

Washington, DC

6-8 April, 1998

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HOW ADULTS LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE

Issues Paper

AUSTRALIA'S MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES: OPENING THE DOOR TO LIFELONG LEARNING

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Summary of workshop: This workshop focuses on successful strategies used in working with immigrant populations. Specifically, strategies for working with adults who have native literacy and those who do not are discussed, as well as strategies for dealing with multiple foreign language groups at the same time.

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AUSTRALIA'S MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES: OPENING THE DOOR TO LIFELONG LEARNING[1]

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ABSTRACT

This context paper has been written to provide background for my Immigration Workshop presentation on *Australia's Migrants and Refugees: Opening the Door to Lifelong Learning*. In keeping with the theme of the conference, it focuses on groups of migrants and refugees with low educational attainment and limited first language literacy.

The first section situates Australia's immigration program within national economic development. The second section outlines the development of policy and programs relating to language and literacy education for migrants and refugees. It describes how policy and institutional approaches recognise diversity in the design and delivery of services.

The third section summarises research undertaken within the Adult Migrant English Program to identify groups of adult learners with special needs and the learning barriers that face them. These studies focus on how characteristics, expectations and previous experiences of learning influence migrant learners' attempts to interpret and cope with the curriculum, teaching methodology, resources and tasks of the Australian language classroom. The section also details policies and practices developed to overcome these barriers and improve the effectiveness of learning. Actual exemplars of curriculum, successful classroom practices and resources will be discussed at the workshop.

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

THE AUSTRALIAN POSTWAR IMMIGRATION PROGRAM

In 1945 the Australian Government launched a large scale planned immigration program aimed at building the country's postwar infrastructure. Over the last five decades 5.5 million settlers from 160 different countries have established new lives in Australia (York 1995:7).

From the end of the Second World War and into the 1960's, Australia welcomed large numbers of assisted immigrants, refugees and displaced persons from the UK and Europe, many unskilled and from rural backgrounds. The profile of migrants changed in the 1970's following the Vietnam War with the entry of large numbers of Indo-Chinese refugees. By the 1980's the immigration program reflected a considerably greater diversity, with arrivals in any one year coming from over 120 source countries from Asia, the former USSR, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Intakes also reflected increased skill levels and higher

[1] The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not represent official government policy.

qualification levels. Although the UK continued as the largest single source country, by 1993-94 the proportion of settler arrivals from mainly English speaking countries had fallen from 2/3 during the post-war years to ¼ of the overall intake, and 5 out of the top 10 source countries had shifted to the Asian region.

By the 1990's economic circumstances in Australia had greatly altered. Three successive recessions led to large numbers of retrenchments, low employment growth and a high level of unemployment. Retrenchments were exacerbated by the re-structuring of industry to achieve global competitiveness. Hardest hit were the manufacturing, mining and construction industries - sectors which had absorbed large numbers of unskilled migrants. Among the first workers to lose their jobs were many post-war entrants who had low levels of literacy in English and had difficulty re-training in the competencies required for the new workplace. Many had immigrated from Italy and Greece over 20 years ago and had chosen to work long hours in factories, rather than study English, to establish a future for their families. [The 1996 *Survey of Aspects of Literacy* reports that 79% of people aged 55-74 years from non-English speaking backgrounds have been identifed as having very poor literacy skills (Crawford 1997:4-5).]

Migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds swelled the ranks of the unemployed. Overseas born men and women from Vietnam, the Middle East and North Africa and Lebanon were significantly over-represented among the long term unemployed (Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner 1994).

Not only did migrants from non English speaking backgrounds lose jobs earlier and at a faster rate than the Australian born or migrants from English speaking backgrounds, their recovery was also considerably slower (Ackland and Williams 1992:29-30). Those without formal skills had difficulty finding work in a dramatically changed industry context where growth had shifted to new service and knowledge industries. Reliance on new technologies and high level communication skills virtually excluded them from these growth areas. New recruitment practices utilised resumes, formal interviews and written tests to select applicants with good literacy and numeracy skills.

Continuing high migrant unemployment has led to both a reduction in size as well as a re-balancing in the composition of the immigration program. More emphasis is now given to the selection of skilled and business migrants with good English language proficiency rather than *family reunion* categories.

The new immigration program has also introduced the principle of user pays to a range of services, including up-front fees for English language tuition for some immigrant categories and the exclusion of some categories from income support during the first two years of settlement. The refugee and humanitarian program remains unchanged, with those entering under these categories continuing to receive full benefits and support from government.

THE ADULT MIGRANT ENGLISH PROGRAM

The Australian Government established the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) as an integral part of its post-war immigration strategy to facilitate the settlement process. Unlike the U.S. and Canada, the Australian orientation program focussed on English language development rather than direct training for naturalisation (Martin, quoting McCusker 1998:4-5).

The first English classes were conducted for European displaced persons in 1947 at the Bonegilla Reception and Training Centre for Migrants in rural Victoria. The program expanded over the next decades, with flexibility as a key feature. Intensive full-time classes and bridging programs for professionals were added to the earlier suite of evening continuation classes. Formal courses were taught in migrant hostels, community centres, church halls and venues accessible to local transport and at times which suited the clients. Industry based programs, later named *English in the Workplace* , were organised from as early as 1952 for employees in public sector industries and large manufacturing companies (Martin 1998:7). Evening and Friday night/Saturday morning classes provided flexible options for employed migrants who

had no access to workplace provision. A Home Tutor Scheme organised regular home visits and informal one-to-one tutorials for the housebound, particularly women. Distance Learning mode catered for the needs of those isolated by geographic distance, transport difficulties, work, health or family commitments.

The AMEP was a partnership between the Commowealth Government and the States / Territories, with the Commonwealth Department of Immigration providing funds and policy directions and each State Department of Education establishing a specific-purpose organisation called Adult Migrant Education Services (AMES) to manage and deliver the program.

A series of Commonwealth Government reviews of the AMEP (Galbally Review 1978; Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs Review 1981; Campbell Review 1985) led to substantial upgrading of post-arrival services to cope with the dramatic explosion in size and diversity of the immigration program.

A network of purpose built adult language teaching centres was established wherever large communities of migrants settled. The Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating (Ingram and Wiley 1979) was developed to provide a common language assessment scale. The teaching workforce was professionalised through a generous policy of study leave for teachers to gain specialist qualifications in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). An alliance was established between AMEP providers and a key academic centre for teaching and research, now known as the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research. Teachers working across States and institutions, supported by academics, collaboratively took on curriculum development and classroom-based action research. The AMEP developed a distinctive learner-centred needs-based communicative methodology, much in line with developments in international TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), gradually distinguishing itself and taking on a leading role in these arena.

Growth and professionalisation of adult TESOL took place in an environment of relative autonomy from other developments in education because program funding, until the 1990's, was managed by the portfolio of Immigration rather than Education. Unhampered by various structural and ideological changes in State education, AMEP providers continued to forge strong professional links across State boundaries and implemented a nationally consistent approach to learner assessment, curriculum, methodology and research. Unlike mainstream education, students and teachers in the AMEP could move across courses, providers and States with a fair degree of continuity and coherence.

Despite its high professional quality, English language tuition for adults remained marginalised in the migrant settlement program, outside mainstream education. Both Commonwealth and the State governments regarded it as part of immigration services rather than education. There was no mechanism to accredit courses, issue credentials, or transfer credits into higher education or vocational programs.

2. CURRENT CONTEXT

FROM MARGIN TO MAINSTREAM

In the 1990's a convergence of factors provided the impetus for moving English language teaching from the fringes into mainstream vocational education and training reform. Research undertaken during the International Year of Literacy uncovered the extent of adult illiteracy among the Australian-born (Wickert 1989), raising considerable concern in the community.

The re-structuring of Australian industry served to highlight vital, but hitherto hidden, links between language/literacy skills and employment, productivity and training. Companies discovered that, even after streamlining their workforce, many core operatives still required literacy assistance to be able to undertake re-training and implement new work team responsibilities. A survey by the Victorian Automotive Industry Training Board in 1991 found that 78.9% of English speaking shopfloor operators and 95.1% of those from non-English

speaking backgrounds required professional assistance with writing to be able to attempt the Vehicle Industry Certificate (Sefton and O'Hara 1992).

THE AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY POLICY

Australia's Language: Australian Language and Literacy Policy, a white paper released by the Commonwealth Government in 1991, changed the national approach to language education by clearly situating it within the core of labour market strategy and the National Training Reform Agenda. The 1991 policy transferred a substantial portion of funding for English language and literacy from the migrant settlement program to mainstream vocational education and training.

Under the National Training Reform Agenda, government and industry initiated a major program of reforms, to ensure the immediate relevance of vocational education and training to the needs of industry. These reforms provide the current policy context for the provision of English language teaching.

New work patterns with responsibilities devolved to work teams, new technologies and new products for new unpredictable markets have increased the demand for complex language and literacy skills. Workplace English language programs integrate language and literacy development with vocational skills, occupational health and safety, quality, and team building modules to ensure that workers from all language and educational backgrounds are able to access Industry Certificates, career paths and improved award payments.

Competency based ESL Certificates have been developed and mapped against the national qualifications framework to ensure portability and articulation into other vocational Certificates. Vocational competencies and job search skills are integrated with English language and literacy to enhance the relevance of training to employment goals of clients. Many English language programs provide a two week component of work experience to familiarise job seekers with current technologies and Australian work culture.

INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAM ARRANGEMENTS

The Australian Language and Literacy Policy established shared portfolio responsibilities for ESL and literacy. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) retained responsibility for initial settlement, defined by the first two years post arrival, and has continued to address issues of language development for new arrivals through the *Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)*.

The Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) has taken on responsibility for training provision for both employed workers and the unemployed. Language and literacy training for employed workers is provided through the *Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL)* program. A variety of labour market training programs and services assist disadvantaged job seekers develop language, literacy, numeracy and employment related skills.

Within each of these programs, variations in client background and needs are recognised through offering a range of targetted programs as well as adjustments in eligibility criteria, compliance requirements and specification of outcomes. Increasing emphasis is also given to flexible delivery and user choice as conditions of funding or in the purchase of services.

Settlement Provision: the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)

Adult migrants and refugees with English language proficiency below functional level, assessed against the Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating scale, are eligible for 510 hours of ESL tuition. They are required to register with the program within three months of arrival, start their tuition within one year and complete within three years. Course provision within the AMEP is based on a nationally accredited competency based curriculum framework,

covering the first three levels of the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) (NSW AMES 1995).

The CSWE framework provides learner pathways that have flexible entry and exit points, recognise prior learning and allow for variation in learning pace, course length, intensity and delivery mode. The framework describes learners according to three dimensions: (a) their language proficiency level, ie *stage*, (b) their learning pace, ie *band* and (c) their needs and goals in learning English, ie *learning goals*.

The different learning pace of learners is recognised through three Bands. Band A learners tend to have limited learning experience in formal settings, ie low levels of formal education and literacy in first language. Band B learners generally have some learning strategies and/or resources, having accessed secondary education in their home country and are literate in first language. Band C learners have a high level of learning resources and some post secondary education and/or technical skills training. Learning pace, course intensity and methodology are varied to match learner groups.

AMEP client profile

Information extracted from the national AMEP database (NMIU 1998) indicates that in 1997 there were 39,129 language learners in the program. Clients in the Refugee and Special Humanitarian (30.4%) and Family (49.6%) categories made up the vast majority of participants.

The top five countries of origin of 1997 participants were the Peoples' Republic of China (25.5%), Vietnam (9.1%), Yugoslavia (8.8%), Iraq (5.5%) and the Former USSR (4.2%). The major refugee and humanitarian groups were born in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovnia, Vietnam, USSR, Iran, Croatia, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Burma. While females made up the majority (60.4%) of all AMEP participants, they represented only 46.5% of the refugee and humanitarian cohort.

Analysis of educational background shows that 12.9% had 0-7 years of formal schooling, 76.1% had 8-12 years and 7.1% had over 12 years of education (4% not stated). The breakdown for refugee and humanitarian clients reflects similar proportions.

A significant majority entered the program at pre-intermediate levels of English proficiency. Mapped against the Certificate levels, 64.1% of clients entered at Stage 1, 24.6% at Stage 2 and 11.3% at Stage 3. Clients with a Band A profile comprised 24.5% of all new enrolments, most of them entering at Stage 1.

Labour market training

In the early to mid 1990's two labour market programs provided training programs that catered for job seekers from non-English speaking backgrounds who had special learning needs arising from limited first language literacy and minimal formal schooling.

Special Intervention Program (SIP)

The *Special Intervention Program (SIP)* was set up specifically to meet the needs of job seekers who are disadvantaged by

- ESL needs
- literacy needs
- outdated work skills or
- employment-related personal development needs.

Assistance of up to 52 weeks of full time training within a two year period was provided to equip job seekers with the basic skills they require to undertake further training or to access employment. Professional assessments were undertaken to determine the individual's major barriers and ensure appropriate placement according to these needs.

The program offered 12 different types of ESL courses, including 5 ESL literacy courses to cater for adults with low oracy/low literacy, retrenched workers with intermediate oracy but low literacy, long term residents with oral proficiency but low to intermediate literacy. At the other end of the spectrum there were courses for professionally qualified residents seeking advanced level English to re-enter their profession. SIP also offered a range of numeracy and literacy courses for proficient / mother tongue English speakers.

The Special Intervention Program provided a pathway for many recently arrived migrants who were exiting the AMEP settlement program but required further English tuition to become truly job competitive. The program was subsumed in 1996, along with a range of other targetted assistance schemes, under the streamlined Job Seeker Preparation and Support program.

The *Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs Annual Report 1996-97* reported that 87,127 job seekers were assisted under various training components of Job Seeker Preparation and Support in 1996-97 (1997:124). Those from non-English speaking backgrounds "formed about 18 per cent of the (Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) client) register in 1996-97 and achieved about 13 per cent (48 000) of all job placements made by the CES. This group received about 10 per cent of total labour market assistance in 1996-97" (1997:114). The report also noted that 21,060 disadvantaged job seekers from language backgrounds other than English gained employment or study related outcomes as a result of case management services (1997:114).

Labour Adjustment Programs

Labour Adjustment Programs were organised specifically to assist retrenched workers from the Textile, Clothing and Footwear and the Passenger Motor Vehicles industries to re-train in new areas. These rapidly declining industries had high concentrations of postwar migrants, who upon arrival went straight into factories where they remained until the recessions of the late 1980's. An analysis of the participation of migrant women in labour market programs (Junor et al. 1994) indicated that 1,794 non-English speaking background women participated in the Labour Adjustment Programs, making up 43.6% of all participants in 1993-94.

For many of the retrenchees this was the first opportunity to actually attend formal English classes. They had learned a spoken form of English on the job, oftentimes by communicating with other post war migrants, but needed to develop skills in reading and writing. Although many of the learners in the Labour Adjustment Programs were older, they were highly motivated language learners and took great delight in participating in a formal classroom setting. For some learning to read and write in English opened up new forms of communication with younger generations of their family. The language courses helped them to explore realistic productive and employment options by involving them in volunteer work, craft stalls, job search skills, vocational skills training and work experience.

Labour Adjustment Packages were discontinued in 1996. Earlier research into the participation of migrant women in labour market programs acknowledged their positive outcomes, with a 66.7% success rate in 1993 compared with the 54.8% success rate for non-English speaking background women and 44.6% for all participants in the Special Intervention Program (Junor et al. 1994:54, 90-90). The study commissioned by the Association of Non-English Speaking Background Women of Australia noted "*concerns about the brevity, quality and discontinuity of the English courses provided under the SIP - in 1993, 25% of SIP ESL classes ran for 6-13 weeks, and another 70 per cent ran from 13-26 weeks*" (Junor et al. 1994:47). This contrasted with the Labour Adjustment Program provision of 52 weeks of English language followed by 52 weeks of vocational skills training.

Job Network

From May 1998 a new arrangement for assisting job seekers with employment services, called *Job Network*, comes into operation. Under this arrangement over 300 private, community based and government service member organisations will be contracted to assist job seekers into employment. Under the most intensive form of support, called *Intensive Assistance*, member organisations will be paid up to almost A$10,000 if they are able to place disadvantaged job seekers in employment for at least 26 weeks. It will be up to the contracted service provider to arrange language and literacy tuition or other forms of support for individual clients.

On-the-job training: Workplace Language and Literacy (WELL) program

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program funds specialist literacy and language provision in companies and industry sectors to assist their operative workers access accredited vocational skills training on the job. Training involves the concurrent development of language, literacy and numeracy and vocational skills as interrelated elements of the learning program. Language is contextualised to meet the requirements of the job. Concurrent language and literacy support ensures that workers with limited competence in English, numeracy or literacy are able to access and complete relevant vocational certificates. The attainment of Industry Certificates provided such benefits as improved pay rates, employer and peer recognition, and confidence to take on additional responsibilities.

Planning and delivery are supported by a workplace consultative process to ensure the on-going support of key stakeholders, particularly senior managers and, in some cases, on-site unions. Enterprises are expected to provide a percentage contribution to the costs of tuition.

In the first three years of its operation (1992-95) the program provided $32.8 million and reached 1,606 workplaces, delivering 2.5 million hours of training to 48,428 participants (Baylis 1995:15). The post implementation review of the program concluded that it acted "as a catalyst for furthering the reform process in many enterprises, promoting the development of a training culture at work and influencing current workplace communication practices" (Baylis 1995:1). Workplace personnel identified four types of benefits:

- achievement of work related credentials
- increased confidence and orientation to work
- improved participation at work and
- enhanced career pathways.

Evidence indicates a continuing need for language and literacy support. *One Size Fits Some* (Mawer and Field 1995) reports that while 50% of Australian born workers have undertaken some training over the last few years, only 35% of non-English speaking background workers have had similar access, with the discrepancy being even greater for migrant women. It is encouraging that an increasing number of Industry Training Advisory Boards have recognised language and literacy development as a training priority.

3. EXEMPLAR: ADULT LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

A study commissioned by government in 1995 to report on the adequacy of adult English language and literacy provision showed that clients with special needs were unlikely to achieve the target exit level of proficiency (NCELTR 1996). Program outcomes reported by the 1994 AMEP Review (McNaught and McGraw 1997:32) indicated that while 78% of clients received an accredited award and 37% exited at the optimum target level of Certificate III, Band A clients did not achieve as high level outcomes as Bands B and C learners. 43% of learners with Band A profiles received no accredited award and only 8% attained the target Certicate III outcome. The study *Language Services for Non-English Speaking Background Women* (Plimer et al. 1996) also highlighted the limited progress made by groups of vulnerable learners, particularly women.

The following section summarises classroom based action research undertaken in the AMEP settlement program to identify groups of adult learners with special needs and the precise

nature of the learning barriers that face them. These studies focus on how characteristics, expectations and previous experiences of learning influence migrant learners' attempts to interpret and cope with the curriculum, teaching methodology, resources and tasks of the Australian language classroom. The section also outlines policies, practices and program arrangements which have been developed to overcome these barriers and enhance learning. Exemplars from these investigations as well as teaching and learning resources developed to address these learner needs will be the focus of the workshop presentation.

CLASSROOM BASED RESEARCH AND CURRICULUM STRATEGIES

Much of the work on migrant and refugee learners with special needs has been brought together by McPherson (1997) in a report *Investigating Learner Outcomes for Clients with Special Needs in the Adult Migrant English Program*. Learner characteristics which have been found to impact on the pace and success of formal language learning (McPherson 1997:1) include:

- no formal education
- limited formal education (ie less than seven years)
- no experience of formal learning as adults
- disrupted education due to war or other political crisis
- functionally illiterate in first language
- from non-roman script backgrounds
- elderly
- suffering sever effects of political torture and trauma
- cultural backgrounds and educational perspectives significantly different from those of Anglo-Australian culture

In the AMEP learners with one or more of the these indicators are acknowledged as having special needs and therefore require instruction which takes account of these needs. An explicit pathway, referred to as *Band A* in the *Certificates of Spoken and Written English*, is now incorporated into the AMEP curriculum framework. Learners are offered a range of course options which vary in length, learning pace, intensity, focus and delivery modes to best meet their disparate needs and backgrounds.

Learners with minimal first language literacy

Methodology emerging from various case studies of learners with limited first language literacy (Huntington 1992, Khoe and Kightley 1986, Green and Piperis 1987, Hood and Kightley 1991, Achren 1991, 1994 and Ramm 1992, 1994) emphasise the need to focus on the learners' immediate personal experience, cultural backgrounds, familiar topics and concrete, real world materials rather than abstract and de-contextualised themes.

Careful analysis of learner responses to pedagogic practices common in language classrooms reveal that some of these activities assume too much shared cultural knowledge. The use of graphics and written work sheets which are intended to reinforce language and aid comprehension can confuse learners and thus become in themselves barriers to learning (Achren 1991). The introduction of abstract notions such as the alphabet and decontextualised vocabulary as preliminary steps to literacy can be devoid of meaning (Hood and Kightley 1991). Even simple line drawings may not be as transparent as teachers think for learner groups who do not have the same cultural frames and life experiences (Ramm 1994).

Special learning sequences need to be planned which begin with concrete experience and slowly build up to more complex and abstract concepts. Ramm (1994), for instance, recommends using real objects to set an immediate and meaningful context, gradually replacing them with photos or realistic pictures, then substituting these with more abstract diagrams or graphics. Huntington (1992) illustrates sequential course design based on a language experience approach to reading and writing for pre-literate adult Hmong refugees. Bilingual assistance is seen as invaluable in clarifying assumptions and interpretations of meanings.

Learners with minimal formal schooling

Learners who have had limited previous experience of formal education have difficulties managing information input, organising learning material, following verbal and written instructions and processing large chunks of new language (Badenhorst 1994, Hajnci 1994). They are distressed by error or by failure to recall learned language. They appear not to utilise information processing skills or mnemonic devices used by those with higher levels of education.

These learners benefit from the inclusion in the curriculum of formal learning skill development, including techniques for study management, problem solving, memorising, categorising, the use of reference tools such as dictionaries and the explicit transfer of skills to other contexts. The constant recycling of language and skills, the inclusion of physical activities and frequent changes of activities were also considered beneficial. A study of non-language outcomes in the AMEP (Jackson 1994) found a strong inter-relationship between the acquitision of learning skills and language-specific gains.

Aged language learners

English classes offer elderly migrants the opportunity to decrease their isolation and facilitate their access to services and community activities. Studies of aged second language learners have established that the right physical and learning environment can compensate for physiological and socio-cultural variables such as perceptual acuity, psychomotor coordination and language-memory that are likely to affect their performance and progress (Er 1986, Aggarwal 1985, Green and Piperis 1987). Recommendations include highly contextualised language relevant to the learners' experience, concrete tasks, multi-sensorial modalities, recycling of content at increasingly deeper levels and optimal physical conditions. Learner anxiety can be reduced by creating supportive relationships within the class, slowing the pace of instruction, putting the emphasis on receptive rather than productive skills and downplaying the role and formality of assessments.

Learners with experiences of trauma

A substantial number of refugees arriving in Australia are survivors of torture and other forms of traumatic experience. The long term effects of these damaging experiences oftentimes impact in varying ways on the learning of English, with key factors relating to the survivors' confidence and self esteem as learners, their motivation to learn, their attitudes towards the target language. Difficult settlement, which may include financial problems, unemployment, children's adjustment to schooling, experiences of racism and discrimination, inevitably affects learning of the host language. Chronic psychological symptoms, such as memory impairment, short attention span, severe anxiety and limited concentration, can override positive motivation and impede learning.

Teachers in the AMEP have worked with specialised agencies like the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture to learn how to provide supportive learning conditions and programs which take account of the complex and diverse needs of these learners.

PROGRAM ARRANGEMENTS

A variety of program arrangements have been introduced in response to the growing awareness of the needs of vulnerable learners. Key principles in designing appropriate options are *differentiation, flexibility* and *continuity* (Plimer and Candlin 1996). Flexibility of delivery for the target group refers to client choice in terms of location, access, intensity, mode, curriculum and methodology. Differentiation and continuity require that provision remains contextualised within the mainstream framework and does not, in the process of accommodating special need, set up new barriers to mainstream access.

Special Preparatory (PREP) Programs

The call for small classes of around 10 students in a quiet and pleasant environment, close to learners and their community has led to a resurgence of community based classes reminiscent of the earlier decades. These new classes, however, have a sharper focus and are better informed about the needs of the target clientele. *Special Preparatory (PREP) Programs* have been established for clients identified as 'at risk', particularly refugees from the former Yugoslavia, Africa, Central America, Cambodia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam. Ethno-specific classes have been organised in transit flats, Maternal and Child Health Centres, Migrant Resource Centres, Community Health Centres, local schools and libraries for Somali, Iraqi, Afghani, Khmer, Arabic and Turkish women.

Most of these classes comprise small groups, provide bilingual assistance and on-site childcare and are conducted on weekends or at times to suit the women and their family commitments. These classes integrate settlement, parenting and health information with language and literacy skills. They involve partners in the community, including key members of the learners' own communities as well as other service providers, advocates and volunteers. *English on Air* which provides bilingual talk back lessons on ethnic radio has captured a large enthusiastic listenership among elderly Cantonese and is well into its third series.

Teaching methods are designed to build confidence and promote success in the classroom, thereby reducing learner anxiety. Careful attention is given to lighting, temperature, acoustics and seating to create a comfortable, safe and supportive physical environment. Special professional development programs have been developed in conjunction with agencies such as the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture to train teachers in mainstream classes to recognise distress symptoms and access professional assistance when needed. Teachers are also trained to evaluate suitability of topics, resources and activities and to implement appropriate classroom strategies e.g working with aggression, distress and inattention.

The curriculum framework used in PREP classes is the same nationally accredited competency-based curriculum used across the AMEP; this ensures that learners have continuity of content and are eventually able to articulate into mainstream programs. The

methodology is considerably more contextualised, concrete, multi-sensorial and 'hands on'. Careful consideration is given to appropriate and transparent visual aids, diagrams and experiential learning. This approach was first developed in the 1980's in programs for young refugees and unaccompanied minors who were identified as being 'at risk' because they were unable to access mainstream schools in Australia (Chou Allender and Davison 1988).

POLICY INITIATIVES

Current immigration policy distinguishes the Refugee and Humanitarian Program from the rest of the Migration Program. Special provisions allow refugees extra time within which to take up their entitlement to free tuition in recognition of the special psychological and other barriers they might face during their initial year of settlement. They are also given greater flexibility in attendance to allow them to withdraw when they feel the need for a break without losing their entitlement.

Additional funding

On top of the entitlement to 510 tuition hours, refugees can now have up to 100 additional hours. This extension is provided in recognition of the special needs of the increasing numbers of survivors of torture and trauma and refugees with little or no formal schooling. Guidelines for the application of these additional hours are being negotiated with language and service providers to ensure that the policy provides the flexibility to meet the diversity of client needs.

Funding for Special Preparatory (PREP) Programs for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants was introduced to cater in particular for the needs of women with low levels of literacy, few years of education and low levels or no formal occupation. This client group was found by a review of *Language Services for Non-English Speaking Background Women* (Plimer et al. 1996) to be least advantaged by the AMEP. The PREP programs emphasise community based delivery in partnership arrangements while maintaining a requirement for appropriate curriculum pathways and quality assurance processes. The courses aim to prepare students for entry into mainstream language courses in the AMEP.

Benchmarks

Benchmarks on language gain developed by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs for the AMEP likewise reflect a recognition that language gain is heavily influenced by factors such as previous level of education and literacy in other languages.

Based on an analysis of the competency achievements of clients in 1996, the Department has developed preliminary client performance targets. These targets are significant in two ways. First, they recognise that measuring success simply in terms of the attainment of a Certificate did not sufficiently recognise learner progress and achievement; they thus measure achievement more finely in terms of actual competencies gained. Second, the benchmarks are differentiated according to the three learner Bands, thus recognising that factors such as previous experience of formal education, first language literacy and age impact on the pace of learning.

Considerably more work is being done to validate this approach to measuring program outcomes. It is nevertheless important to ensure that the diversity of client need is supported not just in terms of differentiating service delivery but also in how we define and measure the benefits they produce for the clients. "*Just as one single measure cannot address all purposes for assessment, neither can one measure address all aspects of learner growth and ability*" (Burt and Keenan 1996:10).

ISSUES

Measuring effectiveness

Most of the Band A learners, particularly because they enter at Stage 1 with minimal English if any, will not achieve the target outcome of either Certificate III or functional proficiency when they exit the AMEP. All the research into their learning needs stress the need for time - time to get their families and lives together, time to heal and build up confidence in a future, time to bridge the massive cultural chasm between their old and new lives, time to learn how to learn. These tasks are all essential ingredients for successful settlement. Language courses contribute to settlement related outcomes as well as to language development.

A study of *Non-Language Outcomes in the Language Classroom* (Jackson 1994:11) identified eight categories of outcomes including confidence, knowledge of social institutions, cultural awareness, and learning skills. Jackson found these gains to be most noticeable and significant for learners with special needs. Similarly the 1995 Review of Workplace program reported that "*increased confidence, as a result of work related English language and literacy training, was the most highly valued outcome by workplace personnel since it facilitated the implementation of workplace reform*" (Baylis 1995:2).

Indeed, the concurrent development of these other, albeit less tangible, skills and qualities would seem essential for the achievement of language gains. It is thus important to measure the effectiveness of the learning experience of Band A learners in terms broader than language gain or competencies / Certificates achieved (McNaught and McGrath 1997:34-35).

Learning pathways

Language and literacy development requires a long term commitment from individuals. The high cost of sustaining this long term commitment has been alleviated in some circumstances by government services and augmented for some individuals. Labour market programs have provided a learning pathway for many registered job seekers who needed to continue learning English. These pathways will be affected, for some individuals, in the transition to new employment arrangements. It will be important to monitor how well the new arrangements are able to assist job seekers who are disadvantaged by their language and educational backgrounds to acquire the relevant literacy and vocational skills they need for employment.

Opportunities for adults requiring slower paced provision over longer periods to continue their learning may lie, rather, in the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector. This sector conducts training that is informal, welcoming, non-institutional and personal - features that make it a key access point for many disadvantaged learners. Managed and owned by local communities, ACE providers form a widespread network of learning centres, neighbourhood houses and community organisations.

"*While ACE has in the past been predominantly associated with leisure and recreational activities of little relevance to people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the inclusion of pathways which include English language literacy and vocational education and training, signals the increasing relevance of the ACE sector to the ongoing settlement and vocational education and training needs of migrant Australians*" (FECCA 1996:6).

In comparative terms the ACE sector is not well resourced, and pressure to compete for mainstream vocational education and training funds is causing the sector increasingly to formalise the nature of its provision, thereby threatening its diversity. The trend towards 'user pays' which shifts costs of education and training to individuals is likewise causing anxiety in the sector, which caters predominantly for women on low incomes for whom cost is a major barrier. "*Public funding of ACE remains critical if the goal of lifelong learning is to be a reality for all Australians, particularly for those where adult learning provides pathways out of disadvantage*" (FECCA 1996:50).

Alternatives to employment

While some migrants and refugees with limited language skills, especially women, may find casual employment or self employment in low skill areas, many are likely to join the ranks of the long term unemployed. The increased demand for literacy and other systemic barriers to employment are causing migrants to turn away from the job market and establish their own businesses.

Australians born overseas from non-English speaking backgrounds have shown a higher propensity to work as employers or self-employed than Australian-born persons or English speaking migrants (ABS Brisbane 1992:54-5). Ethnic small businesses make up one half of the small businesses in many States (Collins 1997:12-13). "*Immigrant women, including those of Asian origin, are engaged in a diverse range of business enterprises, from dressmaking, computer programming and consultancy, tourism, arts and crafts, and various professional and trade services. These businesses contribute significantly to the economy by generating income for the women and their families, as well as creating new jobs, training opportunities and opening up international markets*" (Marshallsay 1996:8).

Research has shown that ethnic small businesses tend to employ from their family or co-ethnics from their communities. Collins suggests that strengthening existing ethnic small businesses and supporting more job seekers from language backgrounds other than English to make the transition from unemployed to entrepreneur would have spin-off benefits in reducing the high unemployment rates of those unable to compete for jobs in the open market because of limited English proficiency (1997:26-28).

A new paradigm: Productive Diversity

To make better use of the tremendous resources brought into the country by its immigration program, Australia needs a new paradigm. Instead of viewing people with limited English as dysfunctional and unable to contribute productively to the national economy, the community should recognise and value the skills that they do possess. This shift in attitude is already starting to occur.

Over a third of migrant workers from non-English speaking backgrounds are over-qualified for their jobs and underpaid for their skill levels (Flatau et al. 1995). "*Many have solid technical, language and cultural skills appropriate to the multicultural nature of their workplaces, are comfortable with different perspectives and communication styles, and would be good trainers, team- leaders and assessors*" (Mawer and Field 1995:49).

Australians who speak the languages of Australia's trading partners, come from these countries, understand their cultures intimately and have continuing personal networks have key roles to play in the Australia's push into world markets. Unfortunately, the take-up rate by business has been slow to date and the potential to maximise competitive advantage offered by the country's linguistic and cultural diversity remains largely untapped (Karpin 1995, Hay 1996:13).

Prognosis for the Future

Labour market statistics clearly establish that new arrivals are particularly vulnerable during the initial settlement period. Those who speak no English at all have a 70% unemployment rate in their first year (ABS Brisbane 1992). However, indications are that migrants do adapt to Australia and that, over time, their employment rates fall to levels comparable with those born in Australia (ABS Brisbane 1992, Ackland et al. 1992).

The prognosis seems to be even brighter for the children of migrants and refugees. A study of second generation Australians indicate that they have achieved educational credentials well beyond their parents' generation, as well as third or earlier generation Australians of the same age group. They also have a 'striking degree of upward mobility' and manage to convert their teritary qualifications to occupations commensurate with the qualifications (Khoo 1995:11-12). The selection this year of the daughter of one of the Vietnamese 'boat people' as Young Australian of the Year is symbolic of this optimistic outlook.

While these trends are encouraging, the path to successful settlement in this highly literate, technologically driven society will nevertheless be long and painful for the learners described in this paper.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Australian experience indicates that it is possible to develop curriculum practices, program arrangements and policies that can effectively address the educational needs of language learners with limited first language literacy and minimal formal education. A number of general principles can be drawn from the exemplar discussed in this paper.

It is important to define the precise nature of learning barriers. Identifying the target group of learners as 'slow' is not as meaningful as it is to discover, for instance, that classroom routines which teachers take for granted are unfamiliar to the learners and actually cause confusion. *Action research*, which involves teachers in a cycle of observing, reflecting and improving, is an effective way to find out how learners think and react to classroom practices. A formal structure to support action research and collegiate participation can assist teachers to identify common patterns and issues.

Pinpointing specific problems makes it possible to develop appropriate strategies to address them. It is feasible to teach learners how to understand and use formal learning tools, activities and processes. The same approach can be used to introduce them to new learning technologies. These decoding and encoding skills are essential for survival, not only in the classroom, but also in other areas of life in literate society. They give learners control over their own learning.

Differentiation, flexibility and continuity are key principles in establishing program arrangements. It is important to have a policy and program delivery framework that is broad and flexible enough to accommodate diversity within the mainstream, i.e. to ensure that no groups are marginalised. The diversity of client need should be matched, within this framework, by differentiated forms of provision, outcomes, benchmarks and ways of measuring benefit and achievement. Policies and funding guidelines which recognise diversity are powerful mechanisms for promoting and rewarding innovative approaches to the customised delivery of services.

CONCLUSION

There are many social benefits to improving participation of all members of the community in lifelong learning. Participation in education changes peoples' lives and improves their life chances, enabling them to develop to their full potential, achieve security for themselves and their families, and contribute productively to their communities. Australia has had a long and proud tradition of opening its doors to individuals and families who have been displaced by war and other traumatic circumstances. It is striving to honour this commitment by ensuring that the settlement program opens up to them the opportunities that come with having the skills and confidence to learn in new ways and to continue learning throughout their lives.

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